

Excerpt from Lee Iron's
The Sabbath as an Eschatological Sign of the Covenant
(Part 1 and 2)

Exposition, Part 1: Theological Considerations

The creation Sabbath was given to Adam as part of the covenant of works, as a sign that he would enter God's eschatological Sabbath rest once his labors were complete. God had set the pattern by his own example of performing the work of creation in six days and resting on the seventh. Man was made on the sixth and last day of God's creation work in God's image. Since man is made in God's image, he must imitate the divine work-rest pattern. We do not know how many weeks or years it would have taken for man to finish the work assigned to him in the covenant of works, but after observing many earthly Sabbaths, he would have eventually finished his work and entered into the eternal Sabbath of God himself. Meredith G. Kline puts it this way:

The imitation-of-God principle was to find embodiment in the over-all pattern of the history of man's kingdom labor in that this history was to correspond to the course of God's creational workings as a movement from work begun to work consummated. Mankind's cultural endeavors were to move forward to and issue in a sabbatical rest. In fact, man was to come by way of these works at last into God's own royal rest (Heb. 4:1ff). [1]

Adam disobeyed God, his dominion work was not completed, and the hope of entering the eschatological Sabbath was seemingly taken away. But God renewed the Sabbath sign with Israel. God made Israel after his own image, to be holy even as God is holy, and offered once again to man the hope of entering into his Sabbath rest. This offer of rest was not the ultimate eschatological rest in heaven, but an earthly rest in the land, ordained by God to be a type and shadow of the ultimate rest. Notice the synonymous parallelism in the following texts: "... the *resting place* [*menuchah*] and the *inheritance* which the LORD your God is giving you" (Deut. 12:9); "The LORD your God gives you *rest* [*nuach*] and will give you this *land*" (Josh. 1:13). The land (particularly Mt. Zion) is described not only as Israel's Sabbath rest, but as God's: "Therefore I swore in My anger, truly they shall not enter into *My rest* [*menuchah*]" (Psalm 95:11). Yahweh said of Mount Zion: "This is *My resting place* [*menuchah*] forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it" (Psalm 132:14; cp. v. 8).

Thus, in keeping with the hope of entering the land and dwelling peacefully and restfully in God's Sabbath rest, Israel was commanded to observe the weekly Sabbath as a sign of the covenant (Exod. 31:13, 16-17; Ezek. 20:12, 20). Interestingly, even when Israel enters the land under the leadership of Joshua, Israel still observes the weekly sign, because, as the author of Hebrews points out, Joshua did not really give them rest (Heb. 4:8), only a typological, shadowy rest that pointed beyond itself to the ultimate rest given through the greater Joshua. Because the land was merely a type of the non-forfeitable, eternal rest to be enjoyed by the elect in heaven, Israel's tenure in the land was not irrevocably guaranteed. Israel in the land was on probation.

Israel's weekly Sabbath is just like Adam's: it comes at the end of the week, after the preceding six days of work. Israel, like Adam, is to work first, then once the work is done, to rest. Israel's Sabbath is therefore a sign of Israel's covenant of works. Only obedient covenant keepers may rest, and disobedient covenant breakers cannot enter God's rest. So with Israel. "And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Heb. 3:18-19).

Israel's Sabbath, on the last day of the week, is therefore a sign of the works principle which was in operation under the old covenant. Of course, the elect among Israel were saved, as are all sinners after the fall, by faith alone in Christ alone, on the basis of the covenant of grace first revealed in Gen. 3:15. However, in addition to the promise of grace, God republished the covenant of works on a national scale with Israel, not as a means of justification, but as a disciplinarian unto Christ (see Paul's summary of the nature and purpose of the Mosaic covenant in Gal. 3:15-25). The observance of the seventh day of rest in Israel was a sign of the presence of this works principle which operated at the typological level of obtaining earthly rest in the earthly inheritance. The Sabbath taught Israel a very important and basic theological lesson: in God's kingdom, work comes first, then rest. [2]

Israel's failure under the covenant of works led to Israel's ultimate removal from the land, that is, from the enjoyment of God's rest. Adam could not bring mankind into God's rest. Joshua could not. Israel as a nation could not. But when Christ the last Adam and faithful Israelite comes, he brings us into God's rest once and for all, by his perfect obedience and works. The work demanded in the covenant of works has been fulfilled. Therefore, the rest offered in that covenant has been secured and offered to us in the gospel. Now, under the gospel, Jesus says, "Come unto me, all who are weary and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). By faith alone, apart from works, we are given rest - not an earthly rest in the land, but the ultimate eschatological rest of God himself.

Although we do not enter that rest by working first, Christ perfectly fulfilled the work-rest pattern in our place as the second Adam. Only when Jesus had finished the work that the Father had given him to do, did the Father glorify him with the glory that he had before the foundation of the world (John 4:34; 6:38-39; 17:3-4). On the cross, he cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Having thus completed the work as second Adam, Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, and given rest at God's right hand as the reward of his labors (Psalm 2:6-8; 18:16-24; 110:1). His heavenly Father has seen the travail of his soul, and is satisfied (Isaiah 53:11).

The resurrection of Christ is therefore a crucial event, because it marks the first time that an obedient man has entered into God's eschatological Sabbath. The eternal rest of God himself, originally offered at the beginning of creation, has finally been achieved for man. As the second Adam and inaugurator of a new humanity and a new creation, the eternal rest of the new heavens and the new earth has intruded into the midst of history. The uninterrupted rest of the age to come has already begun. By faith we lay hold of Christ's rest and enter into the enjoyment of it (Heb. 4:1-11). We have put aside our own righteousness and now serve the living God with a clear conscience as the fruit of that rest, not in order to earn it by our sinful works (Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Thus every day is a Sabbath rest in Christ.

You might think that the conclusion we should draw at this point is that there is no need to observe a weekly Sabbath rest, since we enjoy our rest in Christ every day. However, there is also a not-yet aspect of our rest. We still live in mortal bodies that are weary from earthly toil and labor. We have not yet entered into the final rest that will be given to us when our bodies are raised incorruptible and we behold the Lamb in Immanuel's land. We must not indulge in an over-realized eschatology which leads to the triumphalistic attitude that we have already arrived. We are still pilgrims on the way. In keeping with the already/not-yet tension of New Testament eschatology, therefore, we need a weekly sign of our ultimate rest. The Sabbath is a weekly "rest stop" on our journey to heaven, a foretaste of the eternal rest that awaits us at the end. It is the lamp that lights our path to heaven. It is the downpayment of the future possession.

Why did Adam and Israel need to observe a weekly Sabbath? To be sign of the eternal Sabbath. The weekly sign would stir up their faith and hope and cause them to labor with even greater zeal in the hope of entering that rest. So we too need a weekly sign. Even though we have

already begun to enjoy the eternal Sabbath by faith, and so we do not work in order to rest, yet we have not yet come into the full enjoyment of the eternal rest. We are still waiting for the consummation of all things, and the resurrection of our bodies. We are still tempted to forget about our heavenly hope and get caught up in the things of this present world. So we need a weekly sign to stir up our faith and hope and longing for the eternal rest.

And thus you see that the new covenant Sabbath is both similar to and different from the old covenant Sabbath. The similarity of the old covenant and new covenant is that, in both, the Sabbath is an eschatological sign given to man to point the way to his heavenly hope. The difference is that in the new covenant, that eschatological hope is achieved by faith, not by works! Therefore, the sign of the Sabbath must change from the end of the week *after* the work, to the beginning of the week *before* we lift a finger to do any work. The change of day from Saturday to Sunday is proof of the fact that the works have already been completed for us, by Christ. Our rest is secured already. We don't have to strive and labor and become heavy-laden with the burden of the Law in order to enter and enjoy our rest. It is finished! We rest first (the indicative), and then we go out and serve the Lord in our daily lives (the imperatives). As Vos writes:

Inasmuch as the Old Covenant was still looking forward to the performance of the Messianic work, naturally the days of labour to it come first, the day of rest falls at the end of the week. We, under the New Covenant, look back upon the accomplished work of Christ. We, therefore, first celebrate the rest in principle procured by Christ, although the Sabbath also still remains a sign looking forward to the final eschatological rest. [3]

How did Israel know when to observe the Sabbath? By looking back to the original example established by God at creation. "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exod. 20:11). How does the church know when to observe the Sabbath? By looking back to the example established by Christ at the inauguration of the new creation. On the cross Christ completed the work of the new creation, and was buried, and rose again to enter his rest on the first day of the week; therefore, he has blessed the first day and made it holy (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Thus, the early church called it "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10; Didache 14:1).

The transition from a covenant of works (work, then rest) to the covenant of works fulfillment by Christ (rest, then work) is the basis for the change of the day from the last day of the week to the first. Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week then sets the pattern for the new covenant rest, which is focused on corporate worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2) and enjoyment of our spiritual rest in Christ (Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:1-11), rather than on the strictness of the Mosaic covenant which prohibited all physical work on pain of death.

Exposition, Part 2: Practical Considerations

The Lord's Day has been given to us as a means of grace, an opportunity to reflect upon our present spiritual rest in Christ, and in the future consummation of that rest in heaven, when all our earthly toil will be over. The primary thing that we do on the Lord's Day in order to enjoy this already/not-yet rest is to attend corporate worship with the saints, in order to enter into the heavenly sanctuary and fellowship with Christ. Weekly worship is a foretaste of our eternal worship. The early church gathered together on the first day of the week for the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments (Acts 2:42; 20:7), because Jesus had first established the pattern during his post-resurrection appearances with his disciples.

On the day of his resurrection, he met with two disciples on the road to Emmaus. And what did he do? He preached a redemptive historical sermon to them, showing them the sufferings of Christ

and the glories that would follow. "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, he explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). And after the ministry of the Word, Jesus came to them in an even deeper way through the ministry of the sacrament. "When he had reclined at table with them, he took bread and blessed it, and breaking it, he gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (vv. 30-31). Afterwards, the disciples said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking to us on the way, while he was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (v. 32). And they reported these things to the other disciples, relating "how he was recognized by them in the breaking of bread" (v. 35). Later, Jesus met with all the disciples and pronounced the Aaronic benediction, "Peace be to you" (v. 36), and so we continue the practice today at the close of our services. Similar post-resurrection experiences of fellowship, communion, and instruction are reported elsewhere (Matt. 26:32; 28:7-10, 16-20; Luke 24:40-45; John 20:19-29; 21:9-14; Acts 1:3-4; 10:41).

The early church was convinced that even after Jesus had ascended into heaven, he continued to meet with his disciples through the ministry of the Word and the sacrament. [4] Ever since that time, the church assembles on the first day of the week to meet with Jesus, to have their hearts burn within them as he is proclaimed in all the Scriptures, and to have their eyes opened as they dine with their risen Savior in the breaking of bread. "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread [sacrament], Paul began speaking [preaching] to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message [sermon] until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

So the primary principle in the practical area of new covenant Sabbath observance is that we ought to be inflexibly committed to gathering together with God's people on the first day of the week for public worship in order to fellowship with the risen Christ through the means of grace.

But there is also a secondary principle of new covenant Sabbath observance. On this day we are invited to a physical rest as well as a spiritual rest. The physical rest of the day is a foretaste of the heavenly rest that we will enjoy at the resurrection. But again, the motivation is completely different. In the old covenant, cessation from work was a sign of the fact that their work was the basis for entering God's rest. In the new covenant, by contrast, God's people do not cease from physical work for this reason. Indeed, to rest for this reason would be to reject the finished work of Christ! Thus, in the new covenant, the goal is not to cease absolutely from any and all physical exertion, but in order to enjoy our spiritual rest better. Cessation from work is an act of faith by which we recognize that we are not, like the world, striving to build lasting homes in this present age. We don't have to pursue work the way the world does, investing all our energy and hopes in this life. We can stop from work every week, because we are pilgrims on the way to a better homeland (Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:11). The fact that in the new covenant this cessation from work is placed at the beginning of the week, rather than at the end, highlights the fact that when we rest, we are not really resting "in" our work, as if that work would eventually lead us to heaven, but "from" our work, knowing that Christ has already secured heaven for us.

As a pastor I often get questions that take the following form: "Is it okay to do X on the Lord's Day?" Instead of answering the question directly, I offer two tests which correspond to and flow from the two above-mentioned principles. In the first test I teach people to ask themselves, Will the activity in question hinder me from participation in the corporate worship of God's people? Anything that interferes with my ability to worship the Lord with God's people and to benefit from the ministry of the Word and sacraments, is obviously unacceptable (with exceptions for emergencies, sickness, etc.).

The second test is to ask: Is the activity in question conducive to a spiritually restful frame of mind in which I am reminded that I am a pilgrim on the way to the eschatological Sabbath rest? There are many activities that we may engage in on the other six days, but if done on the Lord's Day might prove to be a spiritual hindrance. The new covenant Sabbath is to be observed not only by attending public worship, but by keeping a spiritually restful frame of mind throughout the day.

This second test is subjective, not in the sense that there is no right answer, but in the sense that it will be answered differently by different people. One person may find activity X conducive to spiritual rest. Another may find that activity X inhibits or saps spiritual rest. I think Paul's principle that whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23) will need to be applied at this point. If you can do the activity in faith, with a clear conscience, and in the knowledge that it is going to promote the overall tenor of the day as "rest stop" on the road to heaven, then you should do it "without misgivings" (Acts 10:20; 11:12).

Notice that this second test (whatever is of faith) flows from the nature of the Sabbath as an eschatological sign. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of my identity as a pilgrim on the way to the heavenly city. This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. If this is what the Sabbath means, then it is observed by faith, that is, by taking advantage of the opportunity afforded by this day to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the week, and to reflect upon and enjoy my eternal rest in Christ. Since this spiritual resting occurs by faith, abstaining from certain activities does not automatically produce it, and engaging in certain activities does not automatically detract from it. There are, to be sure, various external stimuli that many Christians will want to avoid, insofar as these stimuli are often found to detract from a calm and peaceful attitude focused upon Christ. But even here, the judgment will vary from person to person.

In addition to the two tests above, there is another implication of my view that the Sabbath is an eschatological sign for the covenant community. In point 12 above, I state that believers should not abstain from certain activities solely on the ground that such activity may cause unbelievers to work on the Sabbath. This does not mean that any activity which makes unbelievers work is legitimate. Rather, it means that this concern cannot be the sole consideration when evaluating the appropriateness of any given activity. My view forces the individual Christian to make such evaluations on internal grounds - does it hinder or promote *my* spiritual resting on the day? One obvious concrete application of this is that Christians should feel free to go out to eat at a restaurant on the Lord's Day as part of their rest. I should think that our wives would be particularly appreciative of the opportunity to rest from some of the domestic labors that occupy them the other six days.

When is church discipline appropriate in Sabbath matters? Because of the differences that inevitably arise regarding Sabbath sanctification outside of corporate worship, I believe that sessions should allow freedom in this area. This doesn't mean that no instruction should be given. People should be taught the biblical principles, but the application should be left up to the individual or family. The only specific application that should be spelled out is the command to gather with the saints on the first day of the week for corporate worship. Therefore sessions should reserve the use of church discipline for those who forsake the assembly of God's people.

My main concern has to do with the issue of church power, and the relationship between what is said in the ministry of the Word and what is implemented by means of church discipline. [5] If the pastor preaches that abstaining from X is a mandatory implication of the fourth commandment, it follows that anyone who does X on the Sabbath may or ought to be disciplined. To preach one thing and practice another with respect to discipline sends contradictory messages. Any ethical teaching which the church refuses to enforce is ethical teaching which we are saying is biblically doubtful. Disciplining members who are otherwise faithful in church attendance is unwarranted by the New Testament, and puts the liberated children of God back under the weak and beggarly elements of the old covenant with its strict enforcement of the Sabbath.

We should not be surprised that the new covenant Sabbath is less characterized by the spirit of bondage and code-like specificity that stamped the whole old covenant order and especially its stringent enforcement of the Sabbath. The new covenant people of God are no longer minors needing the external tablets of stone to govern and regulate their conduct. We are no longer slaves under the disciplinarian of the law; in Christ we have taken up our place as sons in the kingdom (Gal. 3:25-26; 4:1-7). There is therefore much more freedom for the sons of God to determine how they will sanctify the Lord's Day.

Those who want detailed legislation for new covenant Sabbath observance are in danger of putting themselves back in bondage to the Mosaic Law. To do so would be to miss the real value of the Sabbath as a lamp lighting the believer's way to heaven. Experiencing and enjoying this eschatological significance of the Sabbath is far more important, and beneficial, than becoming consumed with Talmudic details. Indeed, I fear that the neo-Puritans of today so emphasize the casuistry of the literal cessation from labor and recreation that they are in danger of emptying the Sabbath of its rich benefits by turning it into a covenant of works. Those who may be less strict in practical matters, but who are using the day to enjoy a foretaste of their eternal rest in Christ, are the true Sabbatarians.

Is it ever legitimate for someone to do work related to their regular employment on the Sabbath? I believe that in some cases, such work may be necessary in order to avoid financial hardship. How do we determine what constitutes financial hardship? Each individual will have to make those decisions conscientiously before the Lord. A materialistic desire for wealth obviously would not be a legitimate reason. It would not be inappropriate for a pastor to admonish those who appear to have the wrong priorities in this matter. But if they reply that they have prayerfully considered this matter and are acting in faith, and if they are faithful in church attendance, I do not believe it would be appropriate for a session to exercise formal discipline. Liberty of conscience must be preserved even in (or especially in) doubtful cases. However, pastors should encourage people who feel they must work on Sundays to schedule their work in such a way that they are not prevented from regular church attendance.

What are some positive things we should do on the Sabbath? Corporate worship is obviously primary and non-negotiable. In addition to church attendance, various spiritual exercises, both privately and as a family, are also conducive to enjoying our spiritual rest in Christ on the Lord's Day. Bible reading is highly commended. Many of us are so busy during the week that we rarely have much time to meditate deeply on the Word of God. The Lord's Day affords an excellent opportunity to sit down and read lengthier portions of Scripture, enabling us to get the rich benefits of seeing the text in its larger context rather than focusing devotionally on a brief paragraph or handful of verses. For example, it is a rewarding exercise to read an entire book of the Bible in one sitting.

The Lord's Day also affords the opportunity to catechize our covenant children - not merely in the formal sense of memorizing the catechism, but informally as well, through discussions about the sermon, the Bible reading, and so on. I also encourage members of the church to invite other members and visitors over to their house for afternoon/evening fellowship. If there are opportunities for good works of mercy (e.g., visiting shut-ins or people on skid row), that is also to be commended. If your church has an evening service, I would also recommend attending the second service, although I do not see it as an absolute requirement, since there is no Scriptural command to attend worship *twice* on the Lord's Day. In some ways, however, attending an evening service can make it difficult to do the other things like catechizing and fellowshiping with the saints, since there is only so much time in the day (significant commutes to and from church are also increasingly a factor today). Each individual or family will have to make these decisions prayerfully before the Lord. It is tempting to want to do everything every Lord's Day, but we must also keep in mind that physical rest is a significant part of spiritual rest.

ENDNOTES

[1] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (2000), p. 78.

[2] For more on how the works principle operated within Israel, without compromising the unity of the covenant of grace, see *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 320-23.

[3] Vos, *Biblical Theology*, p. 141.

[4] The Maranatha prayer – "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20; 1 Cor. 16:22) – is the oldest liturgical prayer of the early Christian church. It is "an element which connects closely with the fact that the day of the Christian service of worship is the day of Christ's resurrection. On this day Christ appeared at a meal with the disciples. So now he ought to appear again, in the Christian celebration of the Meal, since, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them' (Matt. 18:20) ... The coming of Christ into the midst of the community gathered at the meal is an anticipation of his coming to the Messianic meal and looks back to the disciples' eating with the risen Christ on the Easter days." Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 13-14, 16.

[5] "All church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority" (OPC Form of Government III:3). "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to his Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship" (WCF XX:2). The above statements are founded on the teaching of Scripture concerning the ultimate authority of God's Word. E.g., "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other" (1 Cor. 4:6). See also the warnings against submitting to "the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:1-8; Mark 7:8-9; Col. 2:8, 16-23; Titus 1:14).

[6] Summarizing the views of Nicolas Bownd, an early architect of the Puritan Sabbath, James T. Dennison, Jr. writes: "The universal morality of the Sabbath is indicated in its origin. As a creation ordinance, the Sabbath commandment surpasses yet supplements the law of nature." *The Market Day of the Soul*, p. 42 (emphasis added). Joseph A. Pipa argues, on the basis of Gen. 2:2-3, that "the observation of one day out of seven is a perpetually binding moral obligation based on this creation ordinance ... a perpetually binding creation ordinance." *The Lord's Day*, p. 34.

[7] See the discussion of the creation ordinances in John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*. Note especially his assumption that the creation ordinances, including the Sabbath, remain binding on mankind without substantial change even after the fall (pp. 41-44).

[8] For the distinction between the holy and the common, see Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 155-60.

[9] "Significantly, when the Lord republished the cultural ordinances within the historical framework of his common grace for the generality of fallen mankind [Genesis 3:16-19; 9:1-17], he did not attach his Sabbath promise to this common cultural order ... The only culture on which the sabbatical sign is explicitly impressed is the theocratic kingdom-culture of Israel under the old covenant." Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, pp. 155f.

[10] "The nature and unity of the decalogue (the Ten Commandments) teaches that the Fourth Commandment is an expression of God's universal moral will for all people. The Decalogue serves as a summary of God's moral law." Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, p. 55.

[11] "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). This self-identification of the author of the Law, along with a reminder of the redemptive foundation for the giving of the Law, corresponds to the "preamble" and "historical prologue" sections of the ancient suzerain-vassal treaties, respectively. See Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*.

[12] Kline writes: "It is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. Since in the case of the Decalogue the suzerain is Yahweh, there will be no

representation of him on his seal; but the sabbath is declared to be his 'sign of the covenant.'" *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, p. 120.

[13] Pipa writes: "Genesis 4:3 possibly refers to Sabbath worship when it says that at the end of days Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices. The 'end of days' is most likely the seventh day, the end of the week, the Sabbath day." *The Lord's Day*, p. 39. But since the reader of Genesis has already been introduced to the Sabbath concept in chapter two, the author certainly would have said that Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices "on the seventh day" (*beyom hashebi*) if that is what was intended. It is more likely, then, that "at the end of days" (*meqets yamim*) refers to the end of the agricultural year, when the firstfruits would have been brought. Cain brought the fruit of the ground, Abel the firstfruits of the flock. See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 103.

[14] *Kingdom Prologue*, p. 81.

[15] This view, common among members of the Moore Theological College (Sidney) school of biblical theology, is defended by Peter O'Brien in "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Paternoster, 1987).

[16] The Westminster Confession affirms that the visible church is expressed not only in the local congregation but also in higher levels of ecclesiastical organization. "The visible church ... is also catholic or universal under the gospel ... And particular churches ... are members thereof ..." (WCF XXV:2, 4).

[17] Kevin Giles, *What On Earth is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (IVP, 1996). Giles, also from Australia, presents cogent exegetical arguments against the Moore school's approach to the ekklesia.

[18] My neologism "semi-theocratic" intentionally echoes the more well-known "semi-eschatological," and so I am using it to mean "the theocratic kingdom of Christ in its currently overlapping heavenly/earthly and already/not-yet tension." By affirming the church's semi-theocratic status, I am in no way intending to infuse a note of earthly triumphalism into the church's present existence prior to the parousia. The church's mission remains one of witness-bearing, weakness, and suffering with Christ. The theocratic dimension is exclusively defined in terms of the church's existence in the heavenlies with Christ – a dimension grasped only by faith.

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